

Frequently Asked Questions about...

Hand Hygiene

Q. What is hand hygiene?

A. Hand hygiene is a general term that refers to a method of removing germs from the hands so they cannot be transmitted to anyone else. The two most common types of hand hygiene are *hand washing with soap and water* and using an *alcohol-based hand rub*.

- **Soap and water** should be used when hands are *visibly dirty, contaminated, or soiled, after using the restroom, and before eating or preparing food*. Washing hands with soap and water is also recommended to prevent the spread of certain germs (such as *Clostridium difficile*).
- **Alcohol-based hand rubs** are products that kill germs on the hands. They are fast-acting, convenient, and generally can be used for all situations other than the ones described above. Be sure to use hand rubs that contain 60-95% ethanol or isopropanol (types of alcohol).

Q. Why is there so much focus on hand hygiene?

A. Clean hands reduce the spread of disease! In healthcare and residential facilities, performing hand hygiene protects staff, patients/residents, and visitors from getting sick.

Q. How should hand hygiene be performed?

A. Hand hygiene is easy and quick. Follow either one of the steps below.



Hand washing

- Wet hands with water, apply soap, and rub hands together (for at least 15 seconds).
- Rinse and dry with a disposable towel.
- Use a towel to turn off the faucet.



Alcohol-based hand rubs (use when hands are **not** visibly dirty)

- Apply to the palm of one hand, and rub hands together covering all surfaces until dry.
- Manufacturer will instruct on how much to use.

Q. When should hand hygiene be performed?

A. Whenever hands are visibly dirty and in the situations noted below:

Before

- Putting on gloves
- Handling or administering medication
- Insertion of invasive devices (such as catheters)
- Touching your eyes, nose, or mouth
- Preparing or eating food

Before and After

- Contact with a patient/resident
- Changing wound dressings or bandages

After

- Removing gloves
- Contact with blood, body fluids or non-intact skin
- Touching surfaces or objects in a patient or resident's room that may be contaminated
- Handling garbage
- Using the restroom
- Blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing